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CIA chief rips mail-spy quiz

Colby hits '5th rerun' in Senate

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WASHINGTON — In an unusually strong attack, CIA Director William Colby Monday night condemned Senate hearings on his agency's opening of U.S. citizens' mail as "mere theater" marked by "successive sensational reruns."

Colby called the sessions, begun Tuesday by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "the fifth rerun of the great mail reading story."

The 55-year-old Colby, an intelligence agent since 1943 and CIA chief for the last two years, usually has confined himself to scholarly, quiet protests before Congress against the public glare to which his organization has been subjected the last 10 months.

But on the eve of the current Senate hearings at which a dozen witnesses are scheduled to testify, Colby addressed the Navy League of the United States in New York and lashed out at the investigation.

He asked if intelligence is "to become mere theater . . . for the amusement, or even amazement, of our people, rather than being preserved and protected for the benefit of us all."

"WILL WE HAVE publicity or protection? Will we have sensation or safety?" Colby asked.

Then, in reference to the current Senate hearings, he declared: "We are about to have our fifth rerun of the great mail-reading story."

"It first appeared in my testimony before CIA's oversight committees last January and February. I said we had reviewed and terminated this activity in 1971."

"It's second playing was in the Rockefeller Commission report. This was followed by a TV spectacular featuring Rep. (Sonia) Abzug's indignation."

Ms. Abzug, head of a House

government, operations subcommittee on information and individual rights, heard testimony last March from Colby that his agency maintained files on her from 1953 until 1974. The files contained two letters she had written to the Soviet Union in behalf of clients in 1958 and 1960; other material was connected with her anti-Vietnam War activities.

THE ABZUG hearing was followed by a House Post Office and Civil Service Committee review, Colby declared, and then added:

"And this week the Senate select committee will repeat the performance in greater detail on live TV."

The hearing was called by Sen. Frank Church (D-Ida.) committee chairman, to explore avenues of inquiry that may have gone undeveloped, according to committee officials.

"The purpose is to trace who knew what about the operation, the chain of command and authority," said a committee aide.

COLBY, in previous House testimony, according to United Press International, said that between 1967 and 1972 a CIA

mail surveillance project photographed addresses and sender information on 227,000 envelopes and opened and photographed the contents of 65,000 letters — mostly to and from Russia, China and Cuba.

"I hope our citizens will derive the real message of this mail reading affair . . . that intelligence looked at mail to and from the Communist countries during the threatening days of the Cold War," Colby said.

As he has before, Colby reminded that the CIA determined it was improper in 1973, ordered a halt to activities "not in full compliance with the law" and that the CIA itself reported the matter to the committees now investigating it.

COLBY TOLD the Navy audience that while years ago intelligence had to "tell us where an enemy fleet is" now "we know not only where it is but what it can do."

"We know more," he said "We know what kind of fleet to expect in the future. We have followed the progress of the new Russian carrier presently on sea trials since its keel was laid five years ago."

"We will not be startled by its appearance . . . as we might have been in years past." Colby said the nation "cannot stand blind and deaf in the world of the 1980s because we were hypnotized by our review of the 1950s and 1960s."